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Viewing cable 06PARIS3152, LAURENT FABIUS ON EUROPE AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06PARIS3152	2006-05-12 12:50	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:
http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/documents-wikileaks/article/2011/02/09/wikileaks-les-visiteurs-de-l-ambassade_1477418_1446239.htm

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003152

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/01/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: LAURENT FABIUS ON EUROPE AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S
ELECTION CHANCES

Classified By: Acting DCM Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

(C) 1. Summary and comment: Former prime minister, Socialist Party heavyweight, current presidential candidate, and the EU constitutional treaty's most prominent French opponent Laurent Fabius used a May 11 meeting with several local embassy reps to call for more Europe as the solution to the failed referendum on the EU constitutional treaty and a key to the Socialist Party's 2007 presidential election chances, while offering little in the way of new ideas on how to achieve that. He judged that the Clearstream scandal currently rocking the French government, as well as memories of the 2002 elections when many leftist voters had opted for the radical fringe over the PS mainstream, had increased the likelihood of a PS victory in the 2007 presidential elections. Ironically, his indirect disparagements of current polling leader Segolene Royal unintentionally only underscored his own lack of appeal and inability to create a sense of promise and dynamism. In sum, Fabius himself did not appear truly to believe in his own presidential prospects, and said as much by conceding he was willing to serve in any PS government. End summary and comment.

¶2. (U) Former prime minister, Socialist Party (PS) heavyweight and would-be PS presidential candidate Laurent Fabius met May 11 with Embassy reps from the U.S., UK, Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy, Canada and Russia to discuss his perspectives on the political challenges facing France domestically and vis-a-vis Europe in the run-up to the 2007 presidential elections.

Left's election chances improving

¶3. (SBU) Commenting on the Clearstream affair involving alleged kick-backs for frigate sales used for political skullduggery which has rocked the government of Prime Minister de Villepin and even President Chirac, Fabius said

that any normal democratic government would have resigned or been forced out by now. Fabius showed no hesitation in lumping the main victim, interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy, together with alleged plot-hatchers Villepin and Chirac, calling the scandal an industrial affair that turned into a political manipulation, and was now part of a counter-manipulation. He had no insights into why his own name had made its way onto the list, nor did he appear concerned by it.

14. (SBU) Fabius acknowledged that the scandal would improve the left's chances in the 2007 elections, unless it fails itself. He judged that the chances of splintering were greater on the right than on the left, adding that the experience of 2002 (when far-right Jean-Marie Le Pen made it to the second round instead of Lionel Jospin) had chastened voters against the ineffectiveness of supporting the small, radical parties. He expressed the hope that the elections would present voters with an authentic debate over competing visions, and assumed that Nicolas Sarkozy would be the candidate of the center-right UMP governing party. Fabius saw himself as the candidate best positioned to represent the united left.

I love Europe

15. (SBU) To the surprise of all, given Fabius' role as the first and weightiest PS opponent of the EU constitutional treaty, Fabius then focused on the European Union. He asserted that he had voted against the treaty precisely because he was so pro-European. Claiming that other countries would also have rejected the treaty had it been subjected to referendum, he asserted that voters no longer associated the EU with "protection and progress," and cited the usual litany of concerns about enlargement, illisibility, the crisis of representation, low economic growth, the inflexibility of eurozone monetary and budgetary policy. French rejection of the treaty, he said, only reflected a pre-existing crisis, it was not the cause of the current crisis.

16. (SBU) Asked what he would propose to put the EU back on track, Fabius' response was equally formulaic. The EU needed an energy policy, a commercial policy, more equal competition and better social programs, but he offered no specifics. France needed to participate more freely in internal debates and not lord it over others, in particular the small member states. Franco-German cooperation would remain essential, and Fabius called for facilitating reinforced cooperation among smaller groups within the EU. He rejected Sarkozy's idea of closer coordination among the larger member states, but rehearsed familiar French calls for more resources devoted to technology, research, and energy. He also conceded that the Common Agricultural Program (CAP) swallowed up too much of the EU budget.

17. (SBU) Fabius said that Europe needed to be able to stand on its alone alongside the U.S. and China. To that end, Europe needed to define its limits, and offer the Balkans states, Ukraine and Turkey enhanced partnerships in lieu of membership. He lashed out against the UK (and implicitly against NATO), saying that it still viewed European defense as creating tools on paper rather than using them in practice. On institutional issues, he said that European parliamentary elections of 2009 would be the key to pushing through a new treaty, added that France would need to hold a new referendum to reverse the one of last year. He concluded that the PS should make Europe a central element of its election campaign, by showing how it affects citizens' daily lives and economic growth.

18. (SBU) Questioned where the EU would find the economic growth and budget resources to carry out the policies he was advocating, Fabius hedged and responded with familiar platitudes. France was capable of reform, but it needed stability in order to take risks and avoid "precarity." Other parts of the solution resided in changing the tax brackets, industrial policies, and unspecified "extra-budgetary" means. He noted caustically that debt in France, as well as in the U.S., had increased dramatically under so-called conservative governments. Responding to a question about why he was now more closely aligned with the far left than the pragmatic center, Fabius said that Mitterrand too had moved steadily leftward also while in office. He described himself as a "pragmatic" who had learned from past experience.

The presidential stakes

19. (SBU) Asked about the PS selection process for its presidential candidate, Fabius offered himself indirectly as the alternative to poll-leader Segolene Royal. He asserted that all the party heavyweights except her were in favor of a series of debates, adding that the PS was a party of ideas, not personalities. While Royal was talented, he had doubts that she could appeal to the party's left wing. He equated

her centrism with a sort of "prestidigitation" that might not hold up under more sustained scrutiny, suggesting that her current crest in media popularity would inevitably take a tumble. Asked however about voters' desire to vote for candidates who offer hope and change, Fabius responded by abhorring gimmicks and noting his extensive governmental experience.

10. (SBU) Fabius, echoing Mitterrand, identified himself as the person who could best unify the left, and predicted that the left would win as long as it stayed united. It would also be necessary to develop broader "social momentum" and a sense of inevitability, rather than focusing on interest groups and calculating the PS message accordingly, since -- again quoting Mitterrand -- in politics 2 plus 2 equals either 5 or 3, but never 4. (Comment: This would appear to be precisely Royal's strategy. End comment.) Asked if his calls for unity also applied to himself, Fabius recalled the number of ministerial positions he had held in the past and said he would be prepared to serve again.

Comment

11. (C) Fabius was disappointing, and came across clearly as a politician of the past, notwithstanding his tanned, relaxed and still youthful appearance. All those present were struck by his tired prescriptions for moving France out of its current malaise and his references to the positions he has held in the past rather than his plans for the future. It was odd to hear the EU constitution's most influential opponent claim it was because he loved Europe too much, and his call for the PS to make Europe a central element in the presidential campaign was unconvincing (perhaps signaling a bad conscience). Fabius appeared to disdain Segolene Royal for the very dynamism and common touch he recognizes is necessary but he himself lacks. In sum, he came across as someone who no longer truly believes what he is saying, or even in his own candidacy.

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Stapleton